**THIRSTING FOR THE SPRINGS - SERMONS BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**13. FROM BONDAGE TO FREEDOM by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah."*

*Psalm 32:1-5*

MARTIN LUTHER was once asked which were his favourite Psalms. He replied, "The Pauline Psalms." On being asked to state more particularly to which he referred, he mentioned the 32nd, 51st, 130th, and the 143rd. It is not difficult for anyone who knows the Apostle's thought to discover phrases in these Psalms which might fittingly be placed in the Epistle to the Romans. "According to Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." "With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him there is plenteous redemption." "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no flesh living be justified." All these phrases are characterised by Pauline intensity, and they have the peculiar flavour of the Apostle's thought and inspiration. But perhaps no Psalm is more Pauline than the Psalm whose early passages I wish to attempt to expound. Augustine used to read the Psalm with weeping heart, and before his death he had it written on the wall over his sick-bed, "that he might exercise himself therein, and find comfort therein in his sickness."

What is the evangel of the Psalm? It proclaims the blessedness of forgiveness. Here is a man burdened with the vivid consciousness of personal sin. His sin is to him no vague, disturbing presence, filling him with undefined unrest. His sin stands out before him, bold and clearly characterised. Mark the wealth of the vocabulary which he employs to describe it. He uses three words, and each word reveals a different aspect of his comprehensive conception. He calls it his "transgression." The word is significant of a "breaking-loose." The figure is almost that of a horse that has broken the traces, and is bolting. The cords have been snapped. The yoke has been thrown aside. The man conceives himself as in revolt. He is a rebel, a deserter. He has broken the bands; he has discarded all discipline, and has roamed in ways of unconsidered licence. He also calls it his "sin." He has deflected from the prescribed line of life. He has chosen his own end. He has missed the mark. His life "has not arrived." It is characterised by failure. He also calls it his "iniquity." His life is marred by crookedness and deformity. Guilt has sunk into his faculties, and all of them have been twisted in a certain perversity. Such is the man's vivid consciousness of his own estate. He is a rebel of perverse inclinations, and wrenched by self-will into spiritual deformity. Now, concerning this burning consciousness of personal sin, we are told the man "kept silence." He permitted no one to share his knowledge. He took no one into his confidence. He invited no fellowship, either on the part of man or of God. He shut the fire up in his own life, and "kept silence." How did such secret, silent burden affect the man's life? "When I kept silence my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long." The burden registered its presence in a wearied body. The secret moan resulted in aching bones. There is a wonderful intimacy between the flesh and the spirit. To sap the forces of the one drains the energy of the other. We see a man looking haggard and worn, and we say, "That man has got something on his mind." The burden in the consciousness reveals itself in the weakness and pallor of the flesh. This man, with the secret, unspoken consciousness of sin, dragged along a wearied body. He was continually tired. But he was not only burdened by physical weariness, he was also a victim of mental depression. "Day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me." He moved in a condition of constant depression. He felt as if he was weighed down. There was no lightness about his thought, no buoyancy, no soaring power. He could not get away from the burden "day nor night." He felt that "the hand of the Lord " was weighing upon him! That is a pathetic word. "The hand of the Lord" is usually a minister of succour, of lifting, of resurrection! But here the "hand of the Lord" is regarded as the minister of depression, and the man is held down in mental flatness and imprisonment. But the issues of unconfessed sin are not exhausted in effects upon the body and the mind. "My moisture is turned into drought of summer." He was the victim of a dry, fierce heat! No cool, cooling influences breathed through his soul. He was "heated hot with burning fears." He was possessed by spiritual feverishness. He was disquieted and filled with unrest. He was touchy and irritable with morbid sensitiveness, a sensitiveness that converted trifles into ministers of crucifixion. Such is the oppressive and all-consuming burden of secret and unacknowledged sin.

And now this weary, burdened, feverish soul turns his eyes toward the face of God. He is inclined to open his life to the Father. He "takes it to the Lord in prayer." He will tell God all about it. How ample and all-conclusive is the telling! The Psalmist had a three-fold description of sin, now he has a three-fold description of its confession. "I acknowledged my sin." "Mine iniquity have I not hid." "I confessed my transgressions." The marrow of all these pregnant phrases is that the Psalmist made a clean breast of it. He hid nothing from the Lord. There was no unclean thing concealed within his tent. He opened out every secret room. He gave God all the keys. Everything was brought out and penitently acknowledged. He confessed in particulars, and not in generals. He "poured out his heart before God." He emptied it as though he was emptying a vessel in which no single unclean drop was allowed to remain. His confession was made in perfect frankness and sincerity. "In his spirit there was no guile." There was nothing tricky or under hand in the acknowledgment. Everything was opened, and tearfully revealed.

What was the outcome of the confession? The Psalmist has given us a three-fold word for his burden. He has given us a three-fold word for his confession. Now he gives us a three-fold word to describe the Lord's response. His transgression was forgiven. It was lifted and carried away out of sight. The poor, burdened, wearied deserter brought his heavy load to the Lord, and it was lifted clean away. "He bare the sin of many." Oh, the sense of relief when we have been carrying a heavy load upon our shoulders, and at length it is lifted away! How we stretch ourselves in welcome freedom! How infinitely more so when the burden is lifted from the heart! "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." But the Psalmist uses a second word to describe his emancipation. His sin was covered. I am familiar with that scriptural figure. It meets us again and again in the Word of God. "Thou coverest it with the deep." That is the kind of covering accomplished by our God. He puts an ocean over our sin! "Where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound." Grace rolls over like an immeasurable flood, and our sins are submerged beneath its mighty depths. Our sin is covered. We who have seen the Master know how that gracious covering has become ours. It is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord. "He is our righteousness." "He shall cover thee with the robe of righteousness." A third word the Psalmist uses to describe his deliverance: "The Lord imputeth not iniquity." For given sins are never to be counted; they will not enter into the reckoning. They will not influence the Lord's regard for us. In His love for us, forgiven sins are as though they had never been. Here, then, is the completeness of the freedom of the children of God. Sin forgiven! Sin covered! Sin no longer reckoned! It is not wonderful that this once tried, depressed, feverish soul, tasting now the delights of a gracious freedom, should cry out, "Blessed is the man!" "The winter is passed, and the time of the singing of birds is come."